

Friday, September 19, 2008

NTSB Launches Go-Team to Train Collision in California



RPH Investigator Dave Watson examines the wreckage of the MetroLink train

The National Transportation Safety Board launched a go-team to investigate an accident involving a commuter train and a freight train in California. The accident resulted in 25 fatalities and multiple injuries. The investigation generated a high level of national news media attention.

At about 4:23 p.m. PDT on September 12, 2008 a Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink) passenger train collided head-on with a Union Pacific Railroad freight train in Chatsworth, California.

The Investigator-In-Charge is C. Wayne Workman. Workman and eight RPH investigators were launched from Washington, D.C., Chicago, IL and Gardena, CA offices. These investigators are Dick Hipskind – Track, Tim DePaepe – Signal Systems, Ted Turpin and Jim Remines – Operations, Dave Watson – Mechanical, Dana Sanzo and Rick Downs – Survival Factors, Rick Narvell – Human Performance, Jim Ritter – IIC Support, and Bruce Coury for Research and Engineering. Accompanying the team were Member Kitty Higgins, who served as principal spokesperson for the on-scene investigation; her assistant Denise Daniels; Terry Williams and Peter Knudson for Public Affairs; and Deborah Hall and Paul Sledzik for Transportation Disaster Assistance.

Parties to the investigation are the Federal Railroad Administration, California Public Utilities Commission, Los Angeles Police & Fire Departments, Metrolink, Union Pacific Railroad, United Transportation Union, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, & Bombardier Inc.



Member Kitty Higgins participates in a briefing with LAFD Battalion Chief Jeff Marcus and California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger

NTSB Testifies on Capitol Hill

The NTSB was represented at two hearings on the Hill this week. On Wednesday, September 17, Tom Haueter (AS-1) delivered testimony before the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Subcommittee on Aviation. The hearing allowed the subcommittee to look into the FAA's certification of the Eclipse EA-500 very-light jet. The subcommittee also received testimony from representatives of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), the Department of Transportation (DOT) Inspector General, and Eclipse Aviation.

On Thursday, September 18, Acting Chairman Mark V. Rosenker testified before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Subcommittee on Surface Transportation and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety, and Security. The hearing reviewed the safety of over-the-road buses and the effectiveness of current Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) regulations governing bus safety. In addition to the Acting Chairman's testimony, the Subcommittee heard from representatives of the FMCSA, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), the American Bus Association, Advocates for Highway & Auto Safety, and others.

Board Members Meet to Discuss Aviation and Highway Accidents

The National Transportation Safety Board met in a public Sunshine meeting on September 16, to discuss two transportation accidents and a special investigation report.

First on the agenda was the Special Investigation Report on the safety of parachute jump operations. The Special Report examined accidents that highlighted systemic safety issues within the jump operations industry. The report identified several recurring safety issues with parachute jump operations, and recommended improvements in aircraft maintenance and pilot training. Parachute jump operations represent a segment of U.S. general aviation that transports about 3 million parachutists annually. Although the risks associated with parachuting are generally perceived to involve the acts of jumping from the aircraft, deploying the parachute, and landing, since 1980, 32 fatal accidents claimed the lives of 172 people in airplane accidents unassociated with these parachutist-controlled risks.



The Special Investigation Report was prompted by the investigation of a July 29, 2006, de Havilland DHC-6-100 crash in Sullivan, Missouri. This accident was the topic of the Board's second agenda item. The aircraft, operated by Skydive Quantum Leap as a parachute operations flight, crashed after takeoff from Sullivan Regional Airport. The pilot and five parachutists were killed and two other parachutists were seriously injured. The Board determined today that the probable cause of the crash was the pilot's failure to maintain airspeed following loss of power in the right engine. The Board's study of parachute jump operations issued recommendations to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the United States Parachute Association (USPA) to address a pattern of safety deficiencies in several areas. The Board concluded in the Sullivan investigation that more parachutists may have survived, and injuries may have been reduced, if more effective restraints had been used. As a result of the Sullivan investigation, the Safety Board made recommendations to the FAA and USPA regarding dual-point restraint systems for parachutists that reflect the various aircraft and seating configurations used in parachute operations.

In the final item of the day, the NTSB determined that human fatigue was the probable cause of a truck-tractor semitrailer rollover accident that resulted in a subsequent collision of a motorcoach with the overturned truck, killing five and injuring thirty-five on the motorcoach. Just before 2 a.m. on October 16, 2005, a truck-tractor semitrailer traveling westbound on the I-94 highway near Osseo, Wisconsin, departed the right-hand lane and traveled along the earthen roadside before re-entering the highway where it overturned, coming to rest on its right side and blocking both westbound lanes. About a minute later, a chartered 55-passenger motorcoach, carrying members of a high school band, and traveling at highway speeds crashed into the underside of the overturned truck. The motorcoach driver and four passengers were

fatally injured. Thirty-five passengers received minor to serious injuries, and five passengers were not injured. The truck driver received minor injuries. The Safety Board determined that the driver of the truck- tractor semitrailer was fatigued and fell asleep at the wheel because he did not use his off-duty time to obtain sufficient sleep to safely operate the vehicle. With the low-light conditions of a dark night, the motorcoach driver was unable to see the truck blocking the travel lanes in time to avoid the collision. The Safety Board also found that had the truck been equipped with technologies to detect fatigue, the systems might have prevented or mitigated the severity of the accident. And had the motorcoach been equipped with a collision warning system with active braking, the severity of the accident may have been significantly reduced. As a result of the accident, the NTSB made the safety recommendations to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, and an additional safety recommendation was made to the Whole Foods Market Group, Inc., regarding the implementation of a comprehensive fatigue education program for its drivers to help them manage the risks of fatigue.



Member Sumwalt Addresses FAA-ATO Leadership Summit



Member Sumwalt Addressing the FAA-ATO Leadership Summit

Photo courtesy of Jon Ross

Member Robert Sumwalt spoke to a group of 1300 attendees at "The Federal Aviation Administration Air Traffic Organization (ATO) annual Leadership Summit" in Washington, DC on Tuesday, August 19. A component of the Summit was to help prepare managers for the future regarding leadership roles. In his remarks, Member Sumwalt emphasized that a successful safety culture starts at the top in order to permeate an organization.

Drawing on his years of experience as pilot, accident investigator and air safety representative, Sumwalt said safety culture is a journey and it is that "chronic unease that keeps us on our toes." He challenged participants to lead by example and remain vigilant. "We never want to get smug, relaxed, or complacent because when we do, something will bite us," he said.

Member Sumwalt said management commitment and emphasis, standardization and discipline, training, and data collection and quality assurance are key metrics for maintaining a successful safety culture. "It's your job as leaders to make sure employees are following standard procedures."

Employees, he said, are open to reporting safety problems if they receive assurances that information will be acted upon, data are kept confidential or de-identified and they will not

be punished or ridiculed for reporting. "A punitive culture is a poisonous one," said Sumwalt, adding "a 'just' culture means employees realize they will be treated fairly." Sumwalt said a successful safety culture should fill in the cracks and solidify the wall that protects organizations from unsafe situations.

On Wednesday, September 10, Member Sumwalt spoke to the PARC (Performance-based operations Aviation Rulemaking Committee)/CAST (Commercial Aviation Safety Team) Flight Deck Automation Working Group Industry in Arlington, VA. The working group consists of representatives from industry and government, with the mission of seeking ways to reduce flight crew errors with flight deck automation and will produce recommendations for design, training, operations, procedures, and other areas (such as investigation and analysis of safety data) based on their findings.

Member Sumwalt highlighted the important work of the industry working group and encouraged their continuation of developing an automation training aid, as called for in the Commercial Aviation Safety Team (CAST).

"The Safety Board has investigated several accidents in recent years where there has been a 'disconnect' between the flightcrew and advanced cockpit technology." He referenced the October 2004 Pinnacle Airlines 3701 at Jefferson City, MO, where the Safety Board concluded that "the flight crew's inappropriate use of the vertical speed mode during the climb was a misuse of automation that allowed the airplane to reach 41,000 feet in a critically low energy state." He also discussed a safety recommendation issued by the Safety Board following the December 2005 Southwest Airlines runway overrun accident at Chicago Midway Airport. That recommendation called for the FAA to "require all 14 CFR Part 121 and 135 operators to ensure that all onboard electronic computing devices they use automatically and clearly display critical performance calculation assumptions."

Upcoming Courses at NTSB Training Center

The following courses are available in October at the NTSB Training Center. For more information please contact Jim Pritchert or Paul Schuda.

October 7-8; MS301 Accident Investigation Orientation for Marine Professionals; FIRST TIME COURSE!; similar in design and target audience to the Aviation course (AS301); 1 and ½ days

October 15-16; AS301 Aviation Accident Investigation Orientation; Designed for aviation professionals that don't need the in-depth treatise of the two-week course but DO need to understand the processes going on; 1 and ½ days

October 20-22; TDA301 Family Assistance; The "nuts and bolts" course for aviation on how to deal with Family Assistance issues during aviation accidents; 2 and ½ days

October 28-29; PA302 Managing Communications During an Aircraft Disaster; newly revamped course dealing with how NTSB manages and handles communications during accidents both on-scene and afterwards; 2 days

October 30; TDA404; Airport Preparedness Program; designed for airport and ER personnel; a one-day primer

Employee Express Password Reset

Are you having problems getting into Employee Express because you have lost or cannot remember your password? There is a new feature in Employee Express now to allow employees to have their password immediately reset online. You will be prompted to establish security questions to use if you forget your password. Employee Express is an online system that is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week to help you manage your personnel and payroll information. Use Employee Express to enter your emergency contact information, changes to your address, tax exemptions, etc.